

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 6806

GENEVA FOR USDEL CSCE

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GW, UR

SUBJ: THE SOVIET VIEW OF BRANDT'S FALL: FIRST
THOUGHTS

1. SUMMARY. WILLY BRANDT'S ABRUPT DEPARTURE FROM THE
POLITICAL SCENE WILL BE BAD NEWS IN MOSCOW. NOT
ONLY DID HE OCCUPY A SPECIAL POSITION IN BREZHNEV'S
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TRUST; HE WAS ALSO INTIMATELY IDENTIFIED HERE WITH THE

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF FRG-SOVIET RELATIONS. THERE WILL BE CONCERN (AND SOME PESSIMISM) ABOUT THE INTENTION OF HIS SUCCESSORS TO CONTINUE HIS POLICIES. WHILE WE WOULD EXPECT THE SOVIETS TO MOVE CAUTIOUSLY AT FIRST, THEY WILL ALSO BE REEXAMINING THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE FRG. BRANDT'S EXIT COULD ALSO HELP TO STIR ADDITIONAL DOUBTS AMONG SOVIETS WHO ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE PAYOFFS FROM BREZHNEV'S OVERALL DETENTE POLICY. END SUMMARY

2. THE SUDDEN RESIGNATION OF BRANDT WILL COME AS A BLOW TO THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND TO BREZHNEV PERSONALLY. FOR THEM BRANDT EPITOMIZED THE "HEALTHY FORCES" IN A COUNTRY WHOSE POLITICAL PROPENSITIES MOSCOW DEEPLY DISTRUSTS. IN A SENSE THE SOVIETS CONSIDERED BRANDT COMETHING OF A FORTUNATE HISTORICAL ACCIDENT. AT TIMES THEY EVEN SOUGHT TO HELP HIM THROUGH DIFFICULTIES (E.G., BY INCREASING EMIGRATION TO THE FRG JUST BEFORE THE NOVEMBER 1972 ELECTION). AND BREZHNEV HIMSELF PUT BRANDT, ALONG WITH PRESIDENT NIXON, IN A SPECIAL CATEGORY -- AS TWO WESTERN LEADERS WITH WHOM HE FELT A RELATIONSHIP OF PERSONAL TRUST. INDEED IN RECENT WEEKS BREZHNEV HAD EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT BRANDT'S DIFFICULTIES TO WESTERN VISITORS.

3. WHILE RECOGNIZING THE OBJECTIVE FACTORS BEHIND THE INITIATION AND CONTINUATION OF THE FRG'S EASTERN POLICY, THE SOVIETS HAVE PLACED GREAT -- PERHAPS EXCESSIVE -- WEIGHT ON BRANDT'S PERSONAL ROLE IN THAT POLICY. HIS FALL, THEN, IS LIKELY TO ENGENDER SOME QUESTIONING HERE ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF THE GERMAN COMMITMENT TO DETENTE WITH THE EAST. GIVEN THE HIGH PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD BONN, AS WELL AS THEIR LOW VIEW OF POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS OF SOME ELEMENTS IN THE FRG, THE SOVIETS WILL BE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO SIGNS WHICH BEAR ON THE ATTITUDE OF A SUCCESSOR REGIME TOWARD RELATIONS WITH THE USSR AND ITS ALLIES.

4. THERE MAY BE SOME INCLINATION WITHIN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO USE THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS IN THE FRG AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR TURNING THE SCREW A NOTCH

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TIGHTER ON BERLIN ISSUES. OUR GUESS, HOWEVER, IS THAT THE SOVIETS, IN THE SHORT TERM ANYWAY, WILL PLAY A CAUTIOUS GAME, SEEKING TO AVOID ACTIONS WHICH COULD HARDEN GERMAN POLITICAL OPINION AGAINST THEM. WHILE THE DUST SETTLES, WE MAY EVEN SEE A FALLING OFF IN WHAT IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS HAD SEEMED REVIVAL OF SOVIET PRESSURE OVER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FEDERAL OFFICES IN WEST BERLIN.

5. IN THEIR REASSESSMENT OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FRG SOVIET CONCLUSIONS WILL OBVIOUSLY DEPEND ON WHAT SORT OF POLICY TOWARD THE EAST THEY SEE EMERGING IN BONN. IT IS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT NOTHING THEY CAN FORESEE WILL BE AS GOOD FROM THEIR VIEWPOINT AS WHAT THEY HAVE HAD UNTIL NOW. A PERIOD OF COOLER BILATERAL RELATIONS -- CHARACTERIZED BY INCREASING SOVIET CONTENTIOUSNESS OVER BERLIN ISSUES -- THUS SEEMS A DISTINCT LONGER-TERM POSSIBILITY. ONLY WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE, HOWEVER, WOULD THE SOVIETS REVERSE THEIR OVERALL POLICY TOWARD THE FRG, PARTICULARLY NOW THAT LARGE-SCALE ECONOMIC COOPERATION IS BECOMING A REALITY.

6. THE REMOVAL OF ONE OF THE MAJOR WESTERN FACTORS ENABLING BREZHNEV TO SELL DETENTE TO HIS COLLEAGUES COULD HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOVIET DETENTE POLICY AS A WHOLE. BRANDT'S DEPARTURE MAY MAKE IT EASIER FOR DETENTE-DOUBTERS HERE TO ARGUE THAT THE BREZHNEV APPROACH OVERESTIMATED THE STRENGTH AND STABILITY OF DETENTE ADVOCATES IN THE WEST. THE UNEXPECTED FORCE BEHIND THE JACKSON-VANICK AMENDMENT IN THE U.S., THE UNLOOKED-FOR WESTERN TOUGHNESS ON CSCE BASKET THREE, THE DISAPPEARANCE OF GAULLISM FROM THE MAINSTREAM OF FRENCH POLITICS, AND NOW THE BRANDT RESIGNATION -- THESE ARE ALL ARGUMENTS THAT CAN BE USED BY THOSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO SLOW OR STEM THE PACE OF DETENTE. AS WE HAVE NOTED BEFORE, THE BASIC FACTORS UNDERLYING THE SOVIET PURSUIT OF DETENTE HAVE NOT CHANGED, NOR HAVE THERE BEEN SIGNS OF SERIOUS SOVIET RETHINKING ABOUT POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTE. BUT BRANDT'S DEPARTURE ADDS A STRING TO THE BOW OF THOSE WHO MIGHT INCLINE TO SUCH A REEXAMINATION.

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